

Dalgarno Drug & Alcohol Resource Team



D.A.R.T Member Paper

“There is a greater shame than alcohol.” – Position paper looking at key causal issues behind indigenous alcohol use.

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The Setting

Look around, open your eyes and see that many people are regularly abusing themselves with substances. Alcohol is only one of these, but it is making an impact on individual and family life for thousands of people every day. Addictive, numbing, destructive, a killer.....the glove fits and people choose to wear it!?

Addictive behaviour is a serious societal problem. Alcohol, its use, abuse and acceptance is a serious societal problem. I am not convinced though that this sickness in society is totally what needs to be dealt with, as it seems to be the manifestation of a deeper problem that doesn't get treated. Apply the bandaid, clean the wound, let the sore heal on the surface; but what is happening/circulating in the bloodstream? Can a blood test be done to find out why alcohol is being used as a self-medicated sedative?

For this paper, I am going to particularly be talking about Indigenous people in Australia, but the issue and the answer is applicable to everyone because we all deal with shame to varying degrees. My premise is that Indigenous people are dealing with shame every day because of what has happened in history, and now shame is the root addictive behaviour that manifests in alcoholism, violence, anti-social behaviour and even suicide.

First up, the good (or better) news. What is the national scene with Indigenous alcohol consumption and effects?

"In 2003, alcohol was associated with 7% of all deaths and 6% of the total burden of disease for Indigenous Australians. Excessive alcohol consumption also accounted for the greatest proportion of the burden of disease and injury for young Indigenous males (aged 15–34 years) and the second highest (after intimate partner violence) for young Indigenous females.

In the NATSIHS 2004-5, Indigenous peoples aged 18 years and over were found to be more likely than non-Indigenous people to abstain from drinking alcohol. Of those who did consume alcohol in the week prior to the survey, one in six Indigenous adults (16%) reported long-term (or chronic) risky/ high risk alcohol consumption, up from 13% in 2001. In non-remote areas, the proportion of Indigenous adults who drank at chronic risky or high risk levels increased from 12% in 2001 to 17% in 2004–05.

While rates of risky/ high risk drinking were similar for Indigenous peoples in remote and non-remote areas, people in remote areas were nearly three times as likely as those in non-remote areas to report never having consumed alcohol (18% compared with 6%)." (www.hreoc.gov.au)

In 1997 the Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner noted that *"comparative studies of alcohol consumption by Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people conducted in rural and remote areas have shown that:*

- *Up to 35% of Indigenous men do not drink alcohol compared with 12% of non-Indigenous men*
- *29% to 80% of Indigenous women do not drink alcohol compared with 19% to 25% of non-Indigenous women*
- *In the Northern Territory 75% of Aboriginal people do not drink alcohol at all*

However, of those Indigenous people who do drink, the level of consumption is very high. A survey of Indigenous drinkers in Australia showed that 22% of Indigenous people drink at harmful levels compared to 10% of non-Indigenous people. In order to curb the bad effects of excessive drinking, some Aboriginal communities have chosen to limit the availability of alcohol to their members, or have elected to be dry. “(P.26, Face the Facts)

So a greater proportion of Indigenous people don't drink compared to non-Indigenous people, but those that do drink do so do it at a more harmful level. These drinkers are usually very visible in urban settings. Yet dry communities have been self-controlled havens for many years

So where does 'shame' fit in to this scenario? When I moved to Darwin in 1982 I became very aware of an expression that I heard regularly. The expression is 'shame' or 'shame-job'. Often it's said in relation to an action or behaviour that hasn't worked perfectly, but it is also used before or during a spontaneous or 'up-front/visible' action and will often stifle the outcome. For example,

1. To trip over on a basketball court, would be greeted by a chorus of 'shame!'¹
2. If someone is noticed when they are dancing, others may say 'shame' or that 'they got no shame' (as if they should)
3. Or it may be that when someone is asked to do something that will draw attention to themselves – like sing a song, then they'll say 'shame' and not do it.²

This has been heard from Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, particularly teenagers, and from all over Australia. I heard it loudest in the NT, because Darwin has such a mix of people from all over Australia and the world. I know that it's not limited to just the NT and friends from other States/Territories have endorsed this. We pick up so much from the company that we keep and this can be both good and bad, so this expression is very common in all Indigenous people groups. I have seen that Aboriginal people that I've worked with are more prone to not try something than the non-Indigenous people who will give a situation 'a go'.

It has always appeared that this 'shame' idea was a problem that needed to be overcome in peoples' lives. Some might say that it is a 'spirit of shame', others that it's a cultural expression where people don't project themselves forward in the company of others, so they're not seen to be the 'tall poppy'. These may both be right, but I believe that there's more to it. Over the years, there've been times where I've prayed that the shame that holds my city would be broken so that people can be free to express themselves. There have been many occasions where students have been pushed into doing things of leadership,

¹ For Yolngu speakers the translation could possibly be *gora*, meaning embarrassment, shyness, could be ashamed of action, etc

² This also has to do with Aboriginal learning styles – where you don't try something publicly until you are ready and can do it otherwise you bring great shame on your teacher (this is a positive use of shame, similar to the Japanese approach).

where once they've succeeded they are happier to lead next time, as if the shame at least of potential failure, was broken to a degree.

A shameful realization

What I found helpful in making sense of all this was to get a definition of the word 'shame', hear it identified as an addictive behaviour, and realize that it is different to guilt and embarrassment that I had equated with it. Let me quote Jeff Reynolds:

"The experience of abandonment means that the person who is abandoned is left with the feeling of valuelessness. Rejection is a death experience. Shame is a being word – in other words, it has to do with who we are at the deepest level – and differs greatly from the feeling of guilt. Guilt says that I've done something wrong; shame says that there is something wrong with me. Guilt says that I've made a mistake. Shame says that I am a mistake. Guilt says that what I did was not good; shame says that I am no good." (p.17)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Ethics, p.6) put it this way: *"Instead of seeing God man sees himself. 'Their eyes were opened'(Gen. 3:7). Man perceives himself in his disunion with God and with men. He perceives that he is naked. Lacking the protection, the covering, which God and his fellow-man afforded him, he finds himself laid bare. Hence there arises shame. Shame is man's ineffaceable recollection of his estrangement from the origin. Man is ashamed because he has lost something from the origin; it is grief for this estrangement, and the powerless longing to return to unity with the origin. Man is ashamed because he has lost something which is essential to his original character, to himself as a whole; he is ashamed of his nakedness. Shame and remorse are generally mistaken for one another. Man feels remorse when he has been at fault; and he feels shame because he lacks something. Shame is more original than remorse."*

Shame is very different from guilt, as it's much deeper. As a 'westerner' I'm used to the concept of guilt/remorse, but not so much on the idea of shame. One reason for this could be the influence of Martin Luther and his personal journey with an emphasis on guilt that has effected the way the church and the western world looks at things. Then with this perspective comes the way many non-Indigenous people see themselves and their lives. Aboriginal people have a different world-view and shame is stronger than guilt. Before an Indigenous person has done wrong, they feel that they lack something and are less than they are; because of the way they have been treated historically. The culture of the colonizers and the culture of the Indigenous Australians are different in expression and history, but both cultures are able to nurture the people who live in each. Yet, for over 220 years the dominant culture has said to the Indigenous inhabitants "You are nothing! Your culture is nothing! Your language is nothing!" Is it any wonder that shame is present? When two cultures meet, does there have to be a conqueror and the conquered? Shouldn't different cultures be able to co-habit and celebrate diversity, rather than look to assert dominance and superiority? A word of caution, even in the language that I am using – 'different' is not a judgment of better or worse, right or wrong, but different is just different. Our language system is value-laden and we need to be careful with both what is said, and how it is said.

Today, in contemporary society, behavioural science is also noting the difference in responses to shame versus guilt.

*“There is a differential immunological response to shame versus guilt as measured by proinflammatory secretions. Moreover, one of the more powerful immune enhancers is triggered by observing or experiencing acts of compassion as measured by increased protective immune function. ...I present a **Biocognitive** model that takes bioethics beyond its philosophical domain to address how biology is affected by moral violations (e.g. guilt), by cultural admonishments (e.g. shame), and by exalted emotions (e.g. compassion). While the fight or flight model elegantly demonstrates how threats to physical or emotional safety trigger stress hormones, the biocognitive model addresses how violations of moral tenets affect other immune functions that appear to be more sensitive to ethical consciousness than to survival behavior.” (Martinez. p 1,2)*

The implications of differentiating between guilt and shame

Both guilt and shame, and a number of other forms of behaviour and substance abuse, can actually be at the root of addictive dispositions. As people try to cope with life, and their feelings associated with who they are, there is often a returning to behaviour that feels good even though it is destructive. I feel bad – so I drink/smoke/eat/yell etc. Can shame be an addictive process that has generally been picked up by a whole people-group as they have been dispossessed, killed, assimilated and treated as non-people³? I believe so! The ‘myth’ of Terra-Nullius was defeated with the Mabo Case, but it’s a reality that’s lived out every day by people that are still regularly treated as non-inhabitants of Australia. They were non-people then and little has been done to reverse that trend/perception. The Aboriginal people have been stripped of everything and now are just left with their shame. Land, language, culture, family, pride and meaning were all removed from most Aboriginal people, and their place as the original inhabitants of the land still isn’t written into our constitution, nor has any sort of treaty or Bill of Rights been established. At least in 2008 the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, apologized to the ‘Stolen Generation’ for the forced removal of children from their parents for most of the 20th century.

History can’t be ignored! I find it hard to know fully what to do as I’m relatively new at working in cross-cultural situations, but I see pride in my Aboriginal family. I see them strive to do their best and walk tall in their achievements, but they (in Arnhem Land and Western Australia) also still have all of their culture and language. This is not so everywhere, but what has affected one tribal group of Aboriginal people will affect others, as they see each other as one people. How can people not be affected by knowing that their relatives have suffered so much? The sins of the past are still with us until they are dealt with through repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. These people are still suffering in an ongoing way and trying as best as they can to deal with the pain. It’s this pain that often encourages people to turn to substances or behaviours that can be destructive and addictive; in order to

³ Translated not so much as shame (gora) but ‘wukingor’ – bastard, profane worthless – used to talk about bush foods, medicines and ancient laws/practices of the people.

escape or deaden the pain of life now. Sadly the social problems of today are pointed at as if they could be cured with more education, more money, or stronger convictions, when there's a deeper issue that needs to be dealt with.

My personal definition of 'reconciliation' is: "a restoration of connectedness so that where people have been disconnected from their land, their family, their language, their culture or God – a connection will be restored/reconciled". There appears to be an ongoing paternalistic response to assisting Indigenous people, and in recent years I have heard a many people say that the 'self-determination' of the past 30 years has failed. But has real self-determination actually been allowed. For the past 30 years Indigenous people have been trained and jobs have gone to others who have flown in and out. Self-determination of others is not on my terms, it's on the terms of those who it is designed for. Australia still operates from the premise that the colonial way is better. It is only as people take control of their own lives, in their own way, under their own terms; that they will be empowered to take responsibility for their own decisions and live lives that can have significance and be free of shame. As one Indigenous friend put it "we want a hand up, not a hand-out!"

Can changes be made today?

In recent years I have been involved in the Mawul Rom Project (see www.mawul.com). One of my goals in this has been to show that the traditional learning and ceremonies of the Aboriginal people can be, and are, valued in today's society. Break the shame by honouring the people. More than respecting them, which may keep the people at a respectful distance; to honour them would be to embrace and elevate/raise the people. The project centres around the Mawul Rom Ceremony, a traditional ceremony of reconciliation/mediation, and the Indigenous leaders of East Arnhem Land are now training anyone interested in how to mediate problems today through the ceremony from an Indigenous perspective. In 2011, this ceremony became a 4-year course that is accredited through the Charles Darwin University, so that with some academic writing and collaborative work, a degree course is now available with western and traditional recognition. Assessment is by both elders and lecturers, and traditional learning will be available to all Australians with accreditation in both worlds. This could be one small step to breaking the cycle of shame; that will benefit all of Australia. Non-Indigenous people will fully participate in the ceremony and repeat it over several years to honour this knowledge and bring pride to Indigenous culture. The Mawul Rom Project gives an opportunity for Indigenous culture, or at least one ceremony, to be valued and honoured. Through non-Indigenous people coming each year to learn from the Yolngu people they are given a worth and honour that is valued by everyone. Shame is negated as the people and culture are given honour.

Aboriginal people have a much stronger sense of family than, as a generalization, 'us westerners'. Their sense of connectedness is where life and value lies. To the non-

Aboriginal our job or achievements give us a sense of identity and worth – what we do! To the Aboriginal, identity is found as people share where they come from (the land they are connected to) and who they are related to (so that I can work out my relationship to you and/or how to relate to you). The identity is a corporate thing, not individualistic. What I do is not the important thing in determining my identity. Westerners are doers, Aboriginal people are ‘be-ers’ ie. identity is found in who they are, not what they do. Yet for 211 years Aboriginal people have been told that they are not people, their culture is primitive and inferior, their languages are to be forgotten, and they need to conform to our way of doing things. Their identity, that is ultimately who they are, is not valid in the broader context as they are told and treated as if they don’t matter. One world-view is set up as more valid than another and one group loses out. Again, ‘different’ should not be a word that puts a value on things! It does not mean better or worse, good or bad, it just means different. Yet the assumption is that different is ‘not as good’. Indigenous people been set up for failure, as the playing rules have been changed, and to add to their shame many have failed. But that’s not the fault of anyone, yet blame gets metered out, and people have used coping mechanisms that have not worked. These mechanisms have been escapist and numbing, but have added to the destruction of the people because of the damage to family and culture through the addictions of behaviour or substances. The cycle goes on! We are all made equal and with equal value. The flavour of our world comes through people being themselves in all the diversity that that allows.

So can things change? Can shame be removed? It DEFINITELY can! If people will want and seek change then it’s possible. I don’t believe that the change will come easily; and not by only making fresh resolutions, putting money into programs and meagrely supporting one another. Like many aspects of life that we strive to change, people need help and an enabling to succeed over a prolonged time. To change the way we think and how we behave will take time, help and effort. It’s here that we need help from a power greater than ourselves to achieve a lasting change. Particularly when the help that is needed is internal, rather than the external problems that are often more visible, but cloud our ability to see the real need of overcoming shame. Jesus came into the world to help us, to break the chains that hold us. He was killed to free us from sin, He was raised to life to free us from death, He was beaten so we can be healed, He bore our shame so we can be free (Hebrews 12:1-30). So that when we call on Him - He is able to save all who call - from any situation! God’s arm is not short. He can reach out to all of us. And the God who is in the Bible is the same God who has revealed Himself to Indigenous people throughout time in their stories, their law, their lore and their environment. Parallel histories that reveal a common past rather than a foreign one.

Is the Australian Law system open to alternatives in punishment, that in reality are different but effective. Would you allow burning grass to be placed in a young persons mouth as they danced, to shame them and teach them a lesson? Could a well-placed spear in the leg be an effective punishment alternative to incarceration? Can non-Indigenous Australia look past

the method, to the result, if it is effective short and long term? I hope so, as what we are doing doesn't seem to be achieving the desired results. An elder in Queensland's Murri-Court system noted that maybe 90% of the young Indigenous offenders that came before the elders had offended while under the influence of some sort of substance, and alternative punishments were being given. But punishment still. Would there be less offending if shame was dealt with? Would 'Aboriginal Deaths In Custody' be less if the people were handled differently and shame was removed?

How are we restoring the Indigenous people of Australia from the shame they have been subjected to? In the Australian military I have had it said to me by a Major in NorForce, in the Northern Territory, that "in the army there is not black or white, everyone is green". I know that often military groups will be dropped into isolated areas in Australia, with an Aboriginal person in the group, and very quickly these Indigenous individuals will be leading the group because of their knowledge of the land. The people and the culture are valued and honoured. On the sporting field Indigenous skill is valued. Music by Indigenous artists is valued. Art by Indigenous people is valued. What else?

Community Cohesion

Let me look again at the idea that different cultures are equal, just different. In history one culture will dominate another, without giving value to the dominated one because it is perceived as obviously inferior, as it was conquered. Schools, education, jobs, language, culture and lifestyle are all western ethno-centric and don't give Indigenous thought and life credibility. World-views are different for each culture, and society needs to embrace our differences rather than expect everyone to think and be the same, which is unrealistic. This too will add to wellness within our society:

"In my theory of bio-cognition, I propose that mind, body, and cultural history develop within a fabric that cannot be reduced to their contributing components. To understand the process of how our symbolic consciousness is moulded by cultural and societal parameters, I hypothesize that a society imposes the rules that a group agrees to live by, whereas a culture instils the aesthetic, ethical, transcendental, and wellness consciousness that a group assimilates. While societies are driven by socioeconomic variables entrenched in power agendas (consumerism, politics etc.), cultures are sustained by their archetypal symbols (concepts of motherhood, fatherhood, victimhood, heroism etc.). Consequently, societal compliance is ego-controlled by fear and vanity, whereas cultural assimilation seeks self-meaning and self-expression by identifying with their archetypes. Societies manipulate stressors, and cultures inculcate archetypal coherence." (Martinez. p.3)

Where can things change to help and empower Indigenous people? Firstly, non-Indigenous Australia needs to listen more to Indigenous Australia. My hope is that in valuing Indigenous people and culture we will see the strengthening of both. The power of belief is best summed up in the words of C. Everett Koop M.D., former Surgeon General of the United States:

"There is no question that the things that we think have a tremendous effect upon our bodies. If we can change our thinking, the body frequently heals itself."

The research of people in what is now called bio-cognitive psychology has been encouraging to see both the effect of shame on people, but also its ability to act as a stimulant to strengthen and enable people. *“There is ample historical evidence to support that cultures are more enduring than societies. Although Spain was occupied by the Arabian Empire for seven hundred years, and Ireland was under British rule for eight hundred years, both “conquered” nations maintained their religion, language and other cultural archetypes, while adhering to the social rules of their conquerors. I submit that, because of their pervasiveness, cultural archetypes have greater bio-symbolic significance than social rules. To illustrate: a traffic violation (i.e. breaking a social rule) may trigger a cascade of stress hormones resulting in increased cortisol blood levels, whereas a teacher shaming a student (i.e. cultural admonition) can cause the release of pro-inflammatory products not unlike an immunological response to infection. Thus, from a bio-cognitive perspective, bioethics is broadened from its philosophical domain (i.e. cognitive parameters) to encompass its biological expression. It appears bio-symbols can mimic threats to safety in the absence of real danger, as well as signals of infection in the absence of pathogens, by “tricking” the immune system to respond as if biology rather than symbol were at play.” (Martinez. p.4)*

Shame then, in bringing people down, is not the only feeling to have a bio-cognitive response. These responses are in play in our lives all day, every day. While we are exhorted throughout life to encourage one another, and love one another, this is not the practical reality. We are linked to our environment and everything that takes place in our lives is interactive with all other elements. With such a long history of shame, since the colonization of Australia, it is no wonder that health, emotions, attitudes and behaviour are all effected by the cloud of shame that Indigenous people are born both under and into. *“The evidence for empathy precursors suggests that our bio-cognitive design includes a predisposition for kindness. And when these primal empathy constructs develop into more complex bio-cognitions like compassion, truth, honour, loyalty and other exalted behavior, their violations may trigger a biological reaction to signal dissonance between humane beliefs and malicious action. Thus, this inherent entanglement of cognitive righteousness and exalted emotions, offer evidence to consider ethics as the disembodied abstraction of bioethics: the former being the cognition of moral conduct, and the latter its bio-symbolic integration.” (Martinez. p.5)*

Since colonisation, the suppression and total disregard for Indigenous people and culture has shaped how Indigenous people see themselves. Individuals try to break this cycle and rise above expectations and the perceived norm, but while some do succeed many more don't. Indigenous people, in regard to success, are damned if they do and damned if they don't. I have many friends who are successful in their jobs, but are under the constant additional pressure of having to perform above 'average' as they don't want other people to say that they are 'typical' of the stereotypes. Their minds and bodies are dealing with so much to both survive and to excel. *“In other words, rather than responding based on a fixed genetic template, the nervous and immune systems learn and adapt based on new challenges. Since the nervous system stores survival strategies as neural patterns, and since the immune system is a co-participant in the creation of these essential memories, a biological self and a psychosocial self must be codified to respond in unison to physical (concrete) and cognitive (interpreted) threats.” (Martinez. p.6)* These people and this culture are survivors! On 26 January each year many Indigenous people don't celebrate Australia Day, but instead celebrate Survival or Invasion Day. How appropriate that in the middle of all that is going on that they acknowledge the fact that they have survived.

They've adjusted to the new challenges and they have overcome by continuing to live with their culture. Amazing bodies, amazing determination. But if shame can be overcome then many could move into the future with greater ease, so that their need is not just limited to a basic survival, and substance abuse could be minimized with the removal of its stimulant.

Proud enough to overcome shame

I have been amazed to see the pride on the face of my Indigenous friends and family as we have participated in the Mawul Rom Ceremony. They have expressed so much joy and pride that non-yolngu participants have returned for several years to learn from them. Honouring the ceremony, the culture and the people has brought a breaking of shame over who they are, as they have been externally valued outside of their community, and by people in some senior positions. A discovery code has expanded the horizons of their bio-cognitive selves. *"I now introduce the term bio-cognitive self (i.e. cognition and biology contextualized within a cultural history) to encompass the co-authoring of biological self and psychosocial self. If bio-cognitive self can be heuristically viewed as a bio-psychosocial (i.e. bio-cognitive) interactive entity that defines, protects, and validates the mind-body integrity of a human being, then there must be rules of engagement to differentiate self from non-self in situations of biological challenges and cognitive dissonance. I propose three bioethical codes as mediators to resolve bio-cognitive (i.e. both physical and cognitive) challenges to the integrity of bio-cognitive self. A horizon code is proposed as the cognitive and biological rules that determine the external horizons of a belief field, as well as define what is bio-cognitive self and non-bio-cognitive self. The horizons of the code are maintained cognitively with expectations of reduced safety, and biologically with nervous, immune and endocrine system (stress hormones, immunological deregulation etc) responses. The cognitive-affective parameters of the horizon code serve to maintain bio-cognitive self within known territory and to signal when the boundaries are reached. If the horizon parameters fail to maintain bio-cognitive self-coherence, a regulatory code is activated to address the violations of horizons with more aversive bio-cognitive controls. Transgressions are dissuaded cognitively with apprehensions of dangerous outcome, and affectively with volatile emotions. In order to assimilate new information, however, a discovery code, through the expression of our more exalted cognitions and emotions, serves to expand the horizons of bio-cognitive self. The cognitive-affective composition of the discovery code facilitates the acquisition of knowledge by replacing entrenchment with exploration. The expansion of horizons occurs cognitively through faith (i.e., action with propitious expectations) and affectively with empathy and compassion. Faith, in this treatise, does not refer to a religious belief, but rather to expectations where the actual outcome will be perceived as the best fit. The bioethical codes define, regulate, and expand bio-cognitive self during external and internal challenges. The cognitive-affective modes of each bioethical code have differential effects on the external horizons of bio-cognitive self."* (Martinez. p.7, 8)

There is a sense that the Mawul Rom Project has been somewhat effective in beginning to mediate between the traditional past and the contemporary past to begin mapping a new way of embracing both worlds. Why should it be though, that one of these two aspects of the past needs to be chosen over the other? But as Martinez says, the power of faith worked out with empathy and compassion, will bring change. Will this change include improved health, increased mortality, better ability to handle pressure free of alcohol and other stimulants?

It will be a long road to walk, but the link of health and behaviour to self esteem will mean that as people feel affirmed in who they are they will increase in their ability to thrive. Yet research also indicates that the effects of behavior/conduct affects the health of people. So

to be under a constant cloud of shame would therefore have serious health risks for Indigenous people. *“Since the rules of engagement to maintain integrity of bio-cognitive self (i.e. bioethical codes) are learned within a cultural history, the inculcated ethics (cultural rules of conduct) become bioethics (embodied philosophy). Thus, philosophy embraces biology in an inseparable fabric where adherences (honor, commitment and loyalty) as well as violations (shame, abandonment and betrayal) have differential bio-cognitive consequences. “Bioethical” philosophy becomes one with the biology of ethics. Understanding that moral conduct has biological consequences and, more importantly, that it can affect health by how adherences and violations are processed by the immune system, teaching ethics can no longer be limited to scholarly discourse. Bioethics must be advanced to more than a study of moral conduct. And the lesson to convey, is that conduct affects health because our immune system appears to have morals. (Martinez. P.8,9)*

Indigenous people make up about 80% of people in the Northern Territory on dialysis machines, and while it is easy to assume that this is caused by the change of lifestyle and diet, I wonder if shame is the underpinning cause that has the real impact on lifestyle? It seems that the mind can clearly influence the immune system through bio-behavioural methods, both positively and negatively. Can shame be isolated as a control factor to really see its effect? I think that we need to monitor the specific effects of a wide variety of stressors on many different parameters of human immune function, and as a part of this include the stress of shame. Studies have looked at stressors such as life-change stress, academic and examination stress, bereavement, sleep deprivation, divorce, noise, depression, and others. Overall, evidence does point in the direction of a stress-induced immunosuppression.

“Bio-behavioral strategies may be valuable in the pursuit of improved immune system functioning and health. These methods are low in risk and may potentially be quite complementary for the treatment of a wide variety of illnesses. In addition to effects on the immune system, many of these methods are well known for improving coping ability, providing increased feelings of control, and promoting an increased sense of well-being. All these factors are important in the treatment of any illness. A note of caution is that none of the methods described should be promoted as a cure for any disease. As with all other medical treatments, the responses of individuals are quite variable. No one can predict with certainty which individuals will respond well and which will not respond. Furthermore, a good response does not necessarily mean getting well; a good response can also be less pain, more awareness, and an improved ability to cope successfully with a disease or the dying process. The ability to influence our physiology through self-regulation methods need not create guilt if we are unsuccessful in overcoming illness or imply that individuals cause their own disease. No one can control or even be aware of all the genetic, environmental, life circumstance, and other factors that determine our individual health status. Bio-behavioral strategies provide tools that can be used by clinicians to help people gain a degree of control over factors that are within the scope of our individual influence. This may promote the achievement of a higher quality of life and a better treatment outcome in the face of any disease or health state.” (Halley. P.70)

Shame is powerful and has its outworking in people’s lives in a range of ways, all of which effect the health and life of both individuals and groups. But shame can be removed from lives. Indigenous Australians have an amazing multi-faceted culture that has not only been given to them from God (Wangarr and/or Bunjil are two traditional names), but it has also survived for centuries and is needed in the future of this nation. With the removal of shame many Indigenous people that do drink may not need to any more, and other addictive

behaviours may not develop so easily. Faith will lead to inner strength that will lead to inner health, and there will be less desire to reach out for alcohol as an escape and sedative to the pain of shame. There is a greater shame than alcohol, and that is shame itself. Every life is important, let us work for the day when there is no shame in who we are.

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